



NEWS RELEASE

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TWO JUNEAU GUIDES SENTENCED IN FEDERAL COURT FOR WILDLIFE CRIMES

Anchorage, Alaska – United States Attorney Nelson P. Cohen announced that on January 14, 2009, Juneau residents Shawn Hooton and Shane Hooton were sentenced in federal court in Anchorage on one count of conspiracy to violate the Lacey Act. The sentencing was the result of the Hootons' earlier pleas of guilty to the charge.

Shawn Hooton was sentenced to two years probation, three months home confinement and a \$30,000 fine. He was also ordered to forfeit equipment used in the offense, including a custom .460 Weatherby and scope. During his two-year probation, he is prohibited from commercial guiding and hunting. Shane Hooton was sentenced to a term of one year probation, a fine of \$20,000, and ordered to forfeit a custom .460 Weatherby and scope. He is also prohibited from commercial guiding and hunting during the term of his probation.

Shawn Hooton, age 42, and Shane Hooton, age 41, were sentenced by Chief United States District Court Judge John W. Sedwick.

Assistant United States Attorney Steven E. Skrocki advised the court that the Hootons, who were registered guides, conspired with their father, Larry Hooton, age 70, also a registered guide, to illegally guide out-of-state hunters for brown bears on Admiralty Island National Monument in excess of their one hunt permit issued by the National Forest Service. The plea agreements detailed that the Hootons exceeded their one permitted brown bear hunt limit by guiding three more hunters than the permit allowed and by taking four brown bears when only a single brown bear was allocated by their Forest Service permit. Charging documents and the plea agreements detailed the actions by Larry Hooton, who, as justification for the excess kills, claimed that the additional bears were killed below mean high tide, when, in fact, the client hunters all utilized Admiralty Island lands to stalk and illegally kill the brown bears.

Judge Sedwick scheduled sentencing for Larry Hooton, who also pleaded guilty to the conspiracy, for March 24, 2009. The terms of his plea agreement will require him to pay a \$41,000 fine; pay restitution to the State of Alaska and the Tongass National Forest in the amount of \$30,000; forfeit equipment used during the offense; cease commercial guiding for brown bear; and not to hunt for up to three years. He also faces a possible six-month prison term.

This investigation that culminated in these prosecutions was a cooperative effort by U.S. Forest Service Law Enforcement and Investigations, Alaska Wildlife Troopers Juneau Post, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement and the U. S. Attorney's Office. U.S. Attorney Cohen stated, "Our great state remains home to awe inspiring nature like no where else in our country. The rules put in place on Admiralty Island were designed to protect a brown bear population under pressure. These defendants blatantly violated those rules for personal profit. Along with our law enforcement partners, we will continue to pursue violators and prosecute them criminally."

Special Agent in Charge, Stanley F. Pruszenski with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Alaska Region, complimented all of the participating enforcement personnel on their cooperative efforts, adding, "Alaska is rich in its wildlife resources. We cannot allow this resource to be exploited illegally for commercial gain."

U.S. Forest Service Assistant Special Agent in Charge Dennis Deason stated, "The successful resolution of this case is a tribute to the strong working relationships between all the law enforcement agencies involved in the investigation and prosecution of this case. We hope this will serve as a reminder to those who would illegally exploit our public resources for commercial gain that the agencies involved take our stewardship roles seriously and will aggressively pursue these violations."

The United States Department of Agriculture, United States Forest Service, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service conducted the investigation that led to the prosecution of the Hootons.

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